

COVID-19 ED Staff FAQ

What is COVID-19 and why are we so worried about it?

Coronavirus is from the same family as the virus that causes the common cold and causes a condition called COVID-19. Coronavirus can make you much more unwell than the common cold and even influenza. Humans have not encountered this virus before so we have no immunity against it. Therefore, coronavirus is spreading quickly through the world, infecting many people in a short time frame and threatens to overwhelm our health care systems. The most important measures we need to take are those that minimize the spread of the virus.

How is novel coronavirus spread?

Novel Coronavirus is spread by breathing in droplets of saliva / mucous that are expelled from infected persons when they cough / sneeze. It is thought that you have to be within 1m of the droplets to contract it. Closer contact can result in infection even without coughing / sneezing.

The virus can survive on surfaces for up to three days, so ensure you keep work surfaces clean, regularly wash your hands and avoid touching your face.

How can I minimize the risk of getting infected?

Keep a distance of at least 1.5m from any patient with fever or respiratory illness. If you are seeing a patient with suspected COVID-19, the patient should be wearing a mask and you should be in full PPE.

The virus can survive on surfaces for up to three days, so ensure you keep work surfaces clean, regularly wash your hands and avoid touching your face.

I am part of the non-clinical team, is there any situation when I should be wearing a mask / other protective gear?

You need to wear full PPE if you have to have direct patient contact with a patient suspected COVID-19. If a patient has a respiratory illness but is NOT suspected to have COVID-19, you and the patient should both wear a surgical mask during close contact.

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When should I be returning to work if I have been at home unwell?

If you have had a respiratory illness, you should stay at home until your symptoms are largely resolved. For most illnesses, you should be free of symptoms for 24 hours prior to returning to work eg vomiting, diarrhoea, fever.

When should I be tested for COVID-19?

Indications for COVID-19 testing for health care workers involved in direct patient care include a fever $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ AND acute respiratory infection (shortness of breath, cough and/or sore throat. If you are not too unwell in this instance, it would be suitable for you to present to a fever clinic. You will need to self-isolate until the swab results are available.

What does social distancing mean?

It refers to the practice of limiting mass gatherings and events, as well as small group congregations. It also involves maintaining distance (1.5m) from other single individuals when possible. It is a containment technique for "flattening the curve" of the spread of infection.

What does "flattening the curve" mean?

"Flattening the curve" is a term that refers to slowing the rate of infection spread so that the health care system has enough resources at any point in time to care for patients. It allows increased time to develop treatments. It may reduce the total number of cases, but even more importantly aims to spread the cases over a longer time period.

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Who is more susceptible to developing COVID-19?

- Age > 55yrs
- Diabetes
- COPD (emphysema)
- Asthma requiring hospital admission in the last year
- Active cancer / chemotherapy
- Immunosuppression (autoimmune conditions, HIV, splenectomy, transplant)

What if I am pregnant?

It is not clear what additional risk pregnant health care workers or their unborn children bear regarding COVID-19. The RANZCOG released a guideline (<https://ranzocg.edu.au/news/covid-19-and-pregnant-health-care-workers>) recommending where possible, pregnant health care workers be allocated to patients and duties that have reduced exposure COVID-19 infection, otherwise the usual PPE recommendations apply. Please talk to your line manager about what modifications can be made to your duties.

What are the government recommendations with respect to children attending school & child care?

The Department of Health still advocates for schools in Queensland to remain open with extra precautions in place, but they will support parents who choose to remove their children pre-emptively. If you need to work and have no alternative child care available, it would be very reasonable to keep your kids in school and ensure they adhere to good hand hygiene practices and avoid large group activities.

Why are some healthcare workers taking their children out of school and day care?

Health care workers may be more at risk of taking COVID-19 home to their children than non-health care workers. In turn, this may put their children at higher risk of being infected and subsequently infecting the other children in their classes. Additionally, some health care workers worry that the infection could come into the home FROM school. If the health care worker becomes unwell, they will no longer be able to serve on the front line until they are well again.

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Should I be taking my kids out of school / daycare?

There is no one right answer. It's very dependent on your own children and your personal circumstances. Factors that may affect your decision:

- How much contact you have with patients who are potentially infected ie do you work in the office (less risk) or directly touching and treating patients (more risk)
- Your child's age and grade at school ie older kids may suffer more academically from missing school
- Access to alternate education – online platforms, paper curriculum
- Access to alternate childcare

What are our options for childcare if schools and day cares close?

We recommend that you start are looking for alternative child care options NOW. Consider non-health care worker family and friends, avoiding those over the age of 55 or with medical problems. We are investigating alternate childcare for our staff and will come to you with those options if they are available ASAP. Medical students and some of our non-clinical staff with child care skills are being considered for this purpose.

As healthcare workers how should we approach caring for elderly family members?

It is ideal to reduce contact with family members >55yrs of age and with the medical problems listed above. If this is not possible, take extra precautions such as staying in separate rooms, maintaining a distance of 1.5m from them and offering them separate cutlery, crockery and linen. **Most importantly**, wash your hands very regularly, avoid touching your face and decontaminate when you finish work, **BEFORE** you have contact with them.

Who can I talk to if I am feeling worried / stressed?

- Your peers – they are probably feeling the same way as you
- Your line manager
- Emergency Department peer supporters (details on Teams)
- EAP service: contact 1800 604 640
- Your GP
- Private psychologist/counsellor